

Ten Questions to Ask when Adopting or Revising a Master Plan

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1. **What is the current state of our community?** Before you can begin to plan for the future you must accurately assess the present. What are the characteristics of your community as it stands today? How many residents do we have? What is our current economic base? What is the state of our housing stock? How much property is already zoned for development currently? The Department of Local Affairs can help fill in the blanks with information related to population, census data, demographic data, and economic data. Contact: Cindy deGroen – 303-866-3004. Or check out the Demography section's web site: www.dola.state.co.us/demog/index.htm.
2. **How will these things change over time?** The Department of Local Affairs can also use this data to show and analyze current trends, and help you estimate future trends. Contact: Susanna Lienhard -- 303-866-2354.
3. **What do the members of our community want?** If you already have a plan, how were the members of the community involved in shaping it? Are their desires still the same, or have things changed? If you are starting a new plan, think about how you will find out what the community wants. Community meetings are one method, but there are numerous others, including surveys. The Department of Local Affairs has sample community surveys you can use. Contact: Charles T. Unseld, Office of Smart Growth, 303-866-2353.
4. **Do your zoning and development regulations “implement” your plan, or do they hinder implementation of your plan?** The General Assembly has recently failed to enact legislation on this topic, but may be reconsidering it during the January 2002 legislative session. Even if they don't, however, it is still a very important consideration. For example, if your plan envisions a walkable downtown with living areas above retail shops, but your zoning doesn't allow for mixed use, your community's vision, as embodied in the plan, will be difficult to realize.
5. **How much will it cost to implement the plan?** One often forgotten aspect of comprehensive planning is accounting for its cost. One means of dealing with this issue is to adopt a separate, but complementary, Capital Improvement Plan. But cost considerations can be incorporated into your plan as well. A good plan can help you determine how growth will “pay its own way,” and what priorities your communities chooses to spend its revenue on.

6. **How will you implement the plan?** Your plan should contain specific action items for each visionary statement or goal outlined in the plan. For example, if it is your community's goal to be a "shady, tree-filled community," an action item could be to "Plant two trees for every new building constructed." Even more specifically, you could add "Amend development regulations to require developers to plant two trees for every new building constructed." Consider making it a requirement that each decision of the city council be checked to see if it helps implement the plan. The Department of Local Affairs provides a plan workbook that can be adapted for local use.
7. **How will you know if you have succeeded in implementing the plan?** The plan should contain specific measurements and time frames for determining whether progress is being made towards the goals outlined in the plan.
8. **Does the plan include provisions for the plans of neighboring jurisdictions?** You should try to work with neighboring jurisdictions to ensure that your well-laid plans won't be thwarted by another's actions. While a formal IGA is one way to approach this, it is not the only way. Your plan could provide for consultation with other jurisdictions, review by other jurisdictions, or cross-reference to other jurisdictions' plans. HB 01S2-1020 requires notification of neighboring jurisdictions, and mediation when it is requested.
9. **Is your plan "smart growth" friendly?** Do you have items in your plan that encourage or allow mixed use development? What are your home-based business regulations? Do you encourage or allow infill development? Does your plan encourage pedestrian pathways, or other types of alternative transportation options? Do you require a minimum lot size that is so large it creates unfriendly neighborhoods? Is the area designated for development adjoining already developed lands? Do you have areas designated for preservation from development?
10. **Can you live with your plan?** Remember, a comprehensive plan is a living breathing document. It is a plan, not an ordinance. Take a step back and look at the plan as just that, a "plan" to guide the future of your community. Remember that it needs to be flexible, but not too flexible. It needs to provide guidance to future councils and boards, but not bind them irrevocably to specific actions.